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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MOPS](#) [UK](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: TALIBAN SHADOW GOVERNANCE IN HELMAND PROVINCE

REF: A. (A) KABUL3727  
[B.](#) (B) KABUL4023  
[C.](#) (C) KABUL3286  
[D.](#) (D) KABUL2940

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Director Hoyt Yee  
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1.](#) (C) Summary: There is no coherent structure to Taliban shadow governance in Helmand, but there is a relevant presence of Taliban in large parts of the province which competes with GIROA for local loyalty. While local Taliban leaders work under broad strategic direction from the Quetta shura, the extent to which they provide services varies widely and is dependent on the individual leaders in a given area. In the arena of justice, the Taliban tends to do well but their record in terms of delivering other services is poor or non-existent, and it is in these areas where GIROA has an opening to gain ground. Unfortunately, because formal justice delivery has proven elusive, GIROA is not effectively competing with the Taliban on justice, which Helmandis consistently tell us is one of the most important issues. Taliban response to GIROA or PRT stabilization programs varies from place to place, and ranges from indifference to disruption to exploiting such programs for its own ends. Many of Helmand's District Governors are in contact with their shadow counterparts and sometimes negotiate terms with them to maintain stability in their districts. End Summary.

Shadow Governance: Little Coherent Structure  
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[2.](#) (C) The Taliban shadow government in Helmand has little structure and limited organizational coherence. There is a Provincial Shadow Governor (Mullah Naim), as well as Shadow District Governors (SDGs) for each of Helmand's districts. (Note: There is a GIROA presence in nine of Helmand's 13 districts.) Each SDG oversees two commissions ) one military and one civil ) which constitute the two basic nodes of governance implementation. The military commission, whose head is usually appointed by the Quetta shura, directs military activity in the district with strategic (but not tactical) direction from Quetta; it is not uncommon for the head of the military commission to be an out-of-area Talib. The civil commission tends to be comprised of and headed by local Taliban and deals with socio-economic issues, including justice, and has less, if any, interaction with Quetta.

[3.](#) (C) Although no structural links exist between the shadow district governments, there are broad similarities across the districts in terms of their behavior. All levels of shadow government seek to increase insurgent freedom of movement, generate revenue for the insurgency, and spread conformity of the Quetta shura's version of Sharia law. These shadow government structures appear to be only loosely supervised by Quetta, as evidenced by their relative freedom to implement military operations and Sharia according to local conditions

and imperatives. However, there are indications that Quetta has replaced shadow government officials who were not succeeding in their kinetic activities. Much of the character of the shadow government in terms of its relationship with local Afghans, dealings (if any) with local GIROA actors, and prioritization of service delivery ) especially at the district level - depends heavily on the character of the shadow governor; interestingly, the same can be said for the performance of GIROA district governors.

Provision of Services: It's All About Security and Justice  
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¶4. (C) Taliban shadow governance differs most notably from GIROA in the way it seeks to win over the population and provide services. Generally speaking, Taliban service delivery is confined to security, justice and little else, mainly limited to educating boys in madrassas. There are no Taliban health clinics (though some NGO-run clinics do operate in Taliban-held areas), no agricultural extension services, and no rural development programs. Despite the continuing drag on its credibility by GIROA's limitations in delivering justice, development projects and social services have been a boon to GIROA authorities, one of its core competencies.

¶5. (C) While Taliban justice seems harsh by Western standards, it does provide a sense of certainty and timeliness to resolving disputes, and continues to be an

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attractive alternative to an essentially non-existent GIROA formal justice system. (Note: Per reftel B, the PRT-mentored district Prisoner Review Shuras comprised of district governors, local ANSF heads, and local elders, has made some progress in recent months, but is still a slower and less effective mechanism than Taliban justice.) Aside from justice, the Taliban's main stock in trade is providing security, but in practice this varies widely from district to district. Where there is GIROA, ANSF, or ISAF presence by day, there are often Taliban security patrols at night. Deterring criminality, enforcing Sharia, and protecting local nationals from foreign troops are the stated reasons for these patrols, with intimidation the preferred enforcement tactic. Interestingly, local nationals frequently report that where there is no GIROA or ISAF presence (as in four of Helmand's 13 districts, and those areas outside the "security bubbles"), the Taliban grip on security, and the accompanying intimidation tactics, are reported to be much less severe, lending credence to the argument that the security provided by ISAF troops and GIROA presence can be less desirable than no presence at all.

Ignore, Disrupt, Exploit  
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¶6. (C) In recent months there have been localized indications that the Taliban in Helmand may be shifting their focus away from just controlling the population and towards positively gaining its support. Earlier in the year, the Quetta shura released guidance outlining a "code of conduct" for Taliban fighters and officials, a clear public relations move aimed at Afghans as much as at the West. It remains unclear what changes this guidance may have wrought, and evidence would suggest that any behavioral changes would be localized responses to the needs and grievances of a village or villages, rather than overarching changes in strategy (again, the shadow governance is not that well integrated). While we should not overreach in our analysis, there also are indications that the shadow government may be changing tactics in reaction to GIROA and PRT stabilization activities, likely responding to locals living in Taliban-controlled areas who can see that they are not receiving the same level of support as their neighbors in villages under GIROA control.

17. (C) The shadow government appears to respond to GIROA and PRT stabilization activities in one of three ways: 1) ignore; 2) attempt to disrupt or control outcomes; 3) allow the activities to proceed unmolested, either to win support of local nationals for acquiescing or to exploit the activities for monetary benefit. Attempts at disruption are commonplace, such as Taliban efforts to disrupt elections and recent intimidation measures aimed at PRT-mentored district community councils (Reftel A). In some cases the Taliban have sought to control the outcomes or beneficiaries of GIROA services. For example, at a GIROA hospital in Sangin district, those who have written permission from the shadow governor are offered free treatment, while those without are charged a fee. In Musa Qala district center, as a way of demonstrating their continued power and relevance, the Taliban limit electricity transmission into the district center to three days per week, enforced through a mix of intimidation and negotiation. (Note: Musa Qala district center would otherwise have constant electricity.)

18. (C) Most interesting are episodes in which the shadow government makes use of GIROA/PRT stabilization activities to raise revenue. Water, electricity, and mobile phone service are priorities in Helmand. Due to their continuing control of (or substantial presence in) most of the populated areas of the province ) ISAF and GIROA maintain "security bubbles" around several district centers, but control little other territory ) the Taliban are able to exercise a degree of control over power lines and the mobile phone network, and exploit this leverage to reap tax revenues in exchange for allowing the networks to function. The aforementioned Musa Qala electricity service example illustrates this dynamic, as the PRT believes payments are made as part of the deal. We have observed this same practice in other districts involving Helmand's vast canal system, wherein the Taliban extract payment to allow continued water supply. More recently, the Taliban demonstrated an entrepreneurial use of the UK-funded Helmand Food Zone (HFZ) wheat seed distribution program. (Note: The HFZ program distributes wheat seed and fertilizer to 39,000 farmers in Central Helmand, and demonstrates to many GIROA's ability to deliver government services across large parts of the province.) In some districts, instead of attempting to disrupt the HFZ program and directly challenge GIROA's service delivery, the Taliban simply set up

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checkpoints to tax those transporting the wheat seed from the distribution center to their farms.

19. (C) In the districts, there seems to be a near-symbiotic relationship between GIROA and shadow government, with each providing services that the other does not (justice from the Taliban, development from GIROA). Similarly, many of the core characteristics of shadow governance ) the limited relevance of higher political bodies, great autonomy and lack of accountability for district governors, and wide variations in ruling style and priorities ) are also true of GIROA district-level governance. In many districts under GIROA control, District Governors know and are in contact with the Shadow District Governors; in some cases they have known each other for years and communicate regularly. (Note: Some Shadow District Governors are physically present in their districts, some live in nearby areas, and some are in Pakistan.) In Rig district (Khanashin), District Governor Massoud Jan has known his shadow counterpart most of his life; in Nad Ali district, District Governor Habibullah speaks to his shadow counterpart regularly (sometimes calling Habibullah during meetings with PRT officers to say that he knows what's going on), and although their relationship appears very contentious at times, the PRT believes that the deals they have reached account for much of the stability in and around the Nad-e-Ali district center. Approaches by the shadow government for services are more rare but do occur, and usually involve members of the local Taliban civil or military commission (or elders on their behalf) approaching a District Governor with a request. In the Saravan Qalah area

of Sangin district (Upper Sangin Valley), for example, approaches have been made to DG Faisal Haq with a request for canal clearing to alleviate flooding. As would be expected, PRT visibility on these engagements is very limited and District Governors are reticent about sharing details.

Comment

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¶10. (C) The lack of organizational coherence means that shadow governance in Helmand does not represent a provincial-level alternative to GIROA legitimacy; in fact the term "shadow government" really overstates what exists. That's the good news. At the district level, however, Taliban service delivery does pose a serious challenge, notably on the justice and security fronts, particularly considering the Taliban's effective ability to deliver the former. Building up GIROA capacity to deliver services at the district level - especially justice, but other services well - is the key to overturning what is in many districts a balance-of-power arrangement between GIROA and the Taliban. Whether through the District Delivery Work Group (DDWG) process (Refs C, D) or other mechanisms, we must find a way to get GIROA officials to be physically present and visible in the districts, especially since shadow government Taliban are visible in these communities, as we will never convince fence-sitters to come to GIROA's side if GIROA is not present. We must also redouble our efforts on the justice-delivery front, as justice is consistently cited by Helmandis as a top priority, and is where the Taliban continue to win.  
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